

## Exploits of a Private Detective

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"Is it, indeed?" murmured Donald, gazing with augmented interest. "I have heard him lecture, and read most of his works. I was not aware that he lives in this locality. He is a very learned man, one who— Ah, you are here, Gibson! If I can do nothing more for you, I will return to town at once. Miss Vining, good morning!"

Already he was bowing himself over the threshold, and in a moment he was lost to her view, as he passed, with Gibson, through the hall and out of the house.

The harmless aspect of a live electric wire is not more deceptive than the surface side of Morris Donald. In his tall, thin figure, invariably clad in scrupulous care and taste, few would have looked for muscles of steel. Under his unobtrusive mien the habitual serenity of which was irresistible, he would have discerned the keen mind, the indomitable will, and virile energy that had made him the man he was. None observing him emerge from Doctor Leo Vining's residence that morning would have dreamed that his visit had been at all fruitful.

Yet Morris Donald did not, as he had remarked to Chief Gibson, return immediately to town. With no observable interest in the morbidly curious throng about the driveway, nor in the great gang of swarthy fellows in the disorderly street, he drew on his gloves and walked thoughtfully away in the direction of Professor Sebastian's residence, half hidden among surrounding elms and beeches.

As he approached the gate of the iron fence fronting the broad estate, a man emerged, carrying a covered wicker basket on his arm—a powerful, darkly bearded man, in middle life, who glanced askance at Donald with a pair of intensely black eyes, twice turning to look after him, as the latter passed the gate and continued up the street.

Morris Donald did not appear to have seen him. He strode on for a quarter-mile or more without turning, then retraced his steps, and rang the bell at the door of the famous scientist.

"Please land Professor Sebastian my card," said he to the servant who responded; "and say that I wish he would see me for a moment."

The request was granted, and the elderly professor joined the astute detective in the hall.

"I shall intrude upon you only briefly, professor," said Donald, with a bow, acknowledging the other's greeting. "I have seen in the newspapers that Har-

vard is to be graced with a bronze bust of you, Professor Sebastian, of which a plaster model already has been made.

"That's quite true," Donald, smiled the scientist. "The plaster model was left here only a few minutes ago."

"How very fortunate," murmured Donald. "I want some like work done a little later, and I am somewhat in doubt about whom to employ. If you would allow me to see the model mentioned, and kindly favor me with the name of the maker—"

"You may decide to employ the same man, eh?"

"You read my mind, sir."

"Well, well, you are just in time, Mr. Donald," laughed the genial professor. "I have just placed the model in my library. Come with me and see it. It was made by Giuseppe Romano himself, but it was brought here for my inspection by one of his workmen, a sort of foreman at his yard, I believe."

"Possibly you recall the foreman's name?" queried Donald, lightly.

"Very well," nodded Professor Sebastian. "It is Cristó Pícone. Had you called a little earlier, you would have met him."

"You were expecting the bust this morning?"

"As a matter of fact, I was expecting it last evening, but for some reason there was a delay. In this particular line, Romano is a capital workman. I think I have his business card— Ah, yes; here it is on my desk."

At the north end of Boston, nearly in the heart of the Italian quarter, the name of Giuseppe Romano then appeared above the gate of a high wooden fence, which enclosed a deep yard obscured from general view by surrounding sheds and stables, the most of them in the latter stages of decay.

About 3 o'clock that afternoon, Mr. Morris Donald stood gazing up at the sign mentioned, while he briefly listened to the sounds from beyond the high fence, the clinking blows of numerous hammers in the hands of stonecutters then at work in the yard. After listening, he raised the latch of the gate and entered.

In that portion of the yard nearest the fence and street was considerable monumental work, gravestones and the like, together with a quantity of block marble. Under a roofed section at one side, running nearly to the rear of the deep yard, more than a score of Italian laborers were at work cutting stone.

At the remote end of the yard was a broad, open shed, in which were numerous barrels of dry plaster, a lot of wooden molds, a large furnace and kiln. Aside in one corner, was an enclosed office, the door of which then stood open.

Twenty pairs of Italian black eyes were raised to stare at Donald, as he walked deliberately through the yard and approached the office mentioned. Turning to one of these workmen, he said indifferently:

"Is Romano about?"

"Not now," was the reply. "But the foreman, Cristó Pícone, is in the office."

Donald did not inform him that Cristó Pícone was the man he really wanted. He walked quietly to the office door and had a look at him. It was a bare little place, containing only a cheap desk and two wooden chairs. In one of these, with his back toward the door, sat the man Donald had seen emerge from Professor Sebastian's house that morning. He was engaged in drawing a rough plan of a tombstone on a scrap of paper, and he did not hear Donald approach.

The latter watched him for a few seconds, incidentally noting the meager possibilities of the present office, concealing anything, and he then said curtly, in tones imbued with a subtle threat:

"I want you, Pícone."

The startling announcement, falling unexpectedly upon his ears, brought the Italian out of his chair as if electrified. He saw in the intruder a stranger only, yet one whose searching scrutiny went through him from head to foot.

For an instant he stared darkly at him, then glanced the involuntary glance of one who instinctively feared that something hidden had already been discovered—at an open half-filled barrel of dry plaster, which stood just outside the office door.

Donald smiled in his sleeve. The simple ruse which he had adopted on the spur of the moment had operated beyond his expectations. Yet he now said, less bluntly, before the other could find his voice:

"You are Cristó Pícone, aren't you?"

The Italian, now fearful that he had erred a little, steadied himself, with an obvious effort, and drew nearer.

"Yes; I am," he faltered, with but slight accent. "Why do you—that did you say you wanted me?"

"Well, well, what's the matter with you?" demanded Donald, with an assuring laugh. "You look as if you'd seen a goblin—or a ghost. I was told that Romano is out, and that you were here. I call on a matter of business only."

"Business?"

"Romano has been recommended to

me by a friend for whom he has done some work. The excellent quality of it—"

"Step inside the office, sir," interrupted Pícone. "Please step inside."

With outward indifference, yet not without designs of his own, Donald had fallen back to lean against the door casing, within a foot or two of the plaster-barrel mentioned.

"This is all right, Pícone," said he cheerfully. "It is cooler out here."

"But you can have—you can have a chair inside."

"Oh, I rather enjoy standing," laughed Donald. "I shall stay here only a few minutes."

Somewhat reassured by the last, yet still with a nervousness betraying the abject cowardice of which he was capable, Pícone now forced a smile to his swarthy face, and tersely asked:

"What name? What business?"

"My name is Gleason," Donald glibly declared, with his gaze steadily fixed on his hearer's face. "I have an uncle in the middle west who is quite famous, and he has been thinking of having a bronze bust made. Hello! Something wrong again?"

The heavy black brows of the Italian suddenly had knit close above his glowing eyes. Yet he hastened to answer, half in his throat:

"No; nothing wrong! Why do you say that?"

"Because you scowl when talking with a gentleman," said Donald dryly.

"I only—"

"Oh, it's nothing. To come to the point, Romano was recommended to me by Professor Sebastian of Cambridge, a bust of whom he recently finished."

"Yes, yes, I took it to his house this morning."

"So I was told."

Pícone started slightly, catching back his voice. He now recognized in the visitor the man he had seen, not enter, but pass, the gate of the Cambridge residence just as he was leaving.

As the significance of it came home to him, his frown darkened, a yellowish pallor swept over his face, and his dilating eyes were turned swiftly through the open door in which the tall figure of Morris Donald barred his way.

"Told—yes, certainly," nodded Donald, carelessly raising one foot to rest on the upper chime of the open barrel.

"I called there to see—"

"Take down your foot," interrupted Pícone, with ominous quietude.

"My foot?"

"You may upset that plaster!"

For barely an instant the eyes of the two men met as eyes meet only when the one reads the very soul of the other.

"Suppose I do upset it?" cried Donald. "Do you fear it may disclose—"

"Ah, I am right, then! Yes, Pícone, I want you!"

With the last there came a blow. For Donald, with a quick thrust of his foot, had upset the barrel, and from the loose plaster ejected over the ground he caught a glimpse of the protruding end of a package of banknotes and folded bonds. In an instant, with the snarl of an angry wolf, Cristó Pícone leaped at him and whipped out a stiletto.

Donald, met him half way with a swinging blow under the ear. The swarthy Italian did not so much as reel under it. He went down like a flash, headlong over the fallen barrel, and crashed to the ground beyond it.

A riot never was precipitated more quickly. Instantly all the men in the yard, by each of whom the startling episode had been witnessed, were rushing to Pícone's aid. Some had tools and hammers, others the ever-ready stiletto, and all were wrathful, desperate faces, and at once set up a tumult of shouts and cries that fairly rent the air.

All this served only to bring into play the hidden side of Mr. Morris Donald. He snatched out a pair of handcuffs. Through the cloud of dry white plaster dust that filled the air he bounded upon Pícone, just as the latter was attempting to scramble to his feet, with his stiletto still in hand.

In the sunlight about them the gleaming steel manacles rose and fell with a single sweeping blow. It nearly broke the Italian's wrist, brought a shriek of pain from his drawn lips, and sent his glittering weapon a rod away upon the ground.

"I want you, Pícone, and I'm going to have you!"

The statement was snapped out with amazing coolness, and before it was fairly uttered one of the bracelets had closed with a grinding snap around one of the Italian's wrists. With a violent jerk, Donald then hurled the man prostrate beside him, crying sternly:

"Another move from you, Pícone, and my first act shall be to blow out your brains! Fall back, you noisy fellows! I'll shoot the first man who interferes or comes a step nearer!"

He stood with his shoulders to the office wall, a revolver in either hand, with his tall figure drawn erect, his heel on one wrist of the walling cur at his feet, and, with his coldly gleaming eyes fixed upon the score of infuriated men confronting him some twenty feet away.

"Let him up!"

"Release him!"

"Let him up! Let him go!"

The shouts of the frenzied foreigners, mingled with no end of oaths and imprecations in their own tongue, were

about all that Morris Donald heard for a moment. He held them awed with his leveled weapon, and sternly answered:

"This man is under arrest, and is going with me! Fall back, every one of you, and resume your work."

"I'll kill you—murder me!" shrieked Pícone, writhing in a frenzy of fear at Donald's feet. "Don't let him get me! Don't let him take me from the yard! He will kill—"

"I'll silence you with a bullet at once, you dog, if you speak or move again!" thundered Donald.

"Let him up! Let him go!"

The yells and oaths rose louder.

"Fall back! Unless you do—"

Bang!

A cold-chisel, hurled by one of the angry ruffians, passed within an inch of Donald's head and crashed against the office wall close behind him.

It was the cue for a shower of like missiles, along with hammers and chunks of granite. They rained against the office wall like mighty hailstones, yet the detective, with eyes coldly alert, evaded serious injury.

Then a knife was hurled, whirling with gleaming flashes through the sunlight, only to pierce the woodwork near the head of the dauntless officer, there remaining quivering as if alive.

A hand was raised to throw another, the hand of one of the foremost men in the frenzied crowd.

Crack!

The spiteful report of one of Donald's weapons rang through the yard, and a spurt of blood instantly drenched the upflung hand, followed by a shriek of pain and rage.

"Stand back, you fellows! You see what you're inviting!"

His voice was clear and loud, yet was cold as liquid air. His nerve awed them more, even than his weapons. They never had viewed anything like it.

"Get behind him!" yelled one, in his own tongue. "Pícone's in some bad scrape. We must get him away. Run back of the office, some of you, and down that fellow from behind!"

Half a dozen of them darted away to one side.

Morris Donald turned one arm and fired two bullets directly across their path.

They stopped short, recoiled, stood motionless, snarling and glaring like wolves at bay.

"Don't try any more like that, you rascals, or you'll get hurt!" cried Donald. "I am here to get this man, and I'm going to have him! I shall hate to pump lead into any of you fellows, but if you oppose me longer— Ah, at last!"

There was no further need for bullets, nor for threats.

The gate in the front fence had been thrown open, and three policemen and a score of men and boys, finally drawn

there by the tumult, came pouring into the yard.

It was 4 o'clock when Mr. Morris Donald landed his prisoner at the police headquarters. He left him in an outer room, and proceeded to Chief Gibson's private office, at the end of the corridor. The latter looked up from his desk when Donald entered, gravely flecking a speck of dust from the lapel of his coat.

"Here is a little property, Gibson, which you may hand to the rightful owner," said he, with indescribable nonchalance. "You will find the Italian who killed Doctor Vining seated, in irons, in the outer office."

Chief Gibson was already upon his feet, with eyes starting from his head. "Good heavens!" he roared. "You don't really mean that, Morris Donald?"

Donald laughed softly, and shrugged his shoulders.

"There really was nothing to it," said he, with an insolent drawl. "In the main, Gibson, your deductions were entirely correct. The Italian had a parcel to deliver to Professor Sebastian last evening, having been sent out with it by his employer. Incidentally, he got it badly soiled, and had to take it back and wash it, so it was not delivered until today. It was not wrapped in anything, and—"

"What the deuce are you driving at? I don't see the point."

"Then do not interrupt, my dear Gibson, for it's not good form. The said Italian evidently made a mistake in the house, and in seeking the side door he passed the library window, and saw Doctor Vining counting his money. He laid down his parcel, Gibson, and took a desperate chance to rob him."

"His parcel?"

"The next time you find an impression of a man's face in clay, Gibson, study it more carefully. If you discover that the eyes are wide open, you may be tolerably sure that the impression is that of a bust, rather than a living man. A live man will involuntarily close his eyes when his face is thrust into anything like a mass of clay. Happily, I had heard that Sebastian was having a bust made. It became very easy then to learn the name of the man who should have delivered it last evening."

"By all that's good and great, Morris Donald, your genius surpasses—"

"Pshaw—nonsense! Just a little more ingenuity was required, however, to discover where the scamp had hidden his plunder. He gave me quite a bit of bother to take him in—yet what matters that, since it's done? I shall see you later, Gibson. I've not yet been to lunch. In case the spirit ever moves you, my dear Gibson, you may call on me again."

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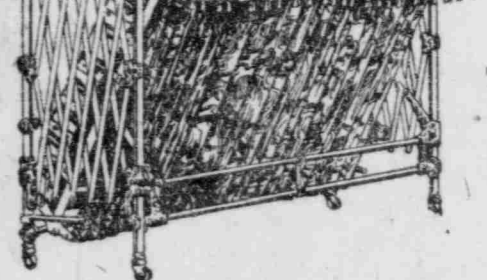
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